



HAESSM “How To” Series

Ya Gotta Have Heart! Five Health At Every Size® Tips for Cardiac Wellness

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Many of us have had our poor hearts broken by medical professionals who have railed on us to lose weight for the sake of our cardiac health. Fat and heart disease are associated--meaning that people who are fat may be somewhat more likely to experience heart disease. But does this mean being fat causes heart disease? Can you effectively prevent heart disease and maintain a healthy ticker using a Health At Every Size Approach?

There is a lot of new evidence indicating that healthy behaviors have a far **greater** impact on heart health than weight. In fact a significant study recently published in *Circulation* magazine (The Journal of the American Heart Association) indicated that healthy behavior—specifically exercise had a far greater impact on heart health and mortality from heart disease than body size. This was not a small or isolated study. It followed over 14,000 subjects for over 11 years. But the outcome was clear—fitness trumps fatness in terms of longevity and heart health.

So, there are a variety of Health At Every Size® behaviors that we can adopt to keep our tickers in tip top shape. Here are five good ones to get you started:

1. **Exercise Joyfully:** As indicated by the study referenced above, fitness is one of the most important factors in maintaining heart health. You don’t need to be a marathoner or a professional athlete. We’re looking for a total of 150 minutes per week or 30 minutes on most days of the week. Even as little as 75 minutes per week can have a positive impact on heart health. It doesn’t need to happen all at once, it doesn’t need to be hard core and it doesn’t need to happen at a gym. Work in the garden. Walk the dog. Park a little further away from your favorite outlet mall. Find pleasurable and manageable ways to work fitness into your life.
2. **Manage your Mood:** Some studies indicate that your emotional outlook on life can significantly impact your cardiac health. People with Type-A personalities, depression and unexpressed anger seem to be more prone to heart problems than those with a happy-go-lucky approach. Luckily there are positive steps you can take to cope with that stress. One step is mentioned above. Exercise enhances mood and helps cope with both depression and anger. Other techniques include relaxation techniques like breathing exercises and meditation. And if you’re having difficulty managing stress, anger or depression your own, seek the services of a qualified mental health professional.

3. **Care for your Teeth:** There is a lot of recent evidence linking dental health with heart health. Gum disease can lead directly to heart disease, infecting the inner lining of the heart (endocarditis). Some research also suggests that heart disease, clogged arteries and stroke may be linked to oral bacteria, possibly due to chronic inflammation. So do like your mom told you—brush, floss and see your dentist regularly.
4. **Know your Numbers:** It's important to be aware of your key cardiac indicators including your cholesterol and blood pressure levels. That means seeing your doctor regularly. And since you're seeing that doctor regularly, it's smart to pick one that doesn't raise your blood pressure through the roof. White coat hypertension is a well documented phenomenon which causes some people to exhibit significantly elevated blood pressure in their doctor's office. So try to pick a doctor you can respect, who respects you and with whom you can communicate effectively.
5. **Eat Colorfully Close to Nature:** I'm not suggesting the dreaded "D-word" here, (You know, the one that starts with "die" and ends in agony and frustration.) But there is a lot to be said for eating a variety of delicious foods, from both land and sea, that are close to a natural state. Heavily processed foods tend to be very high in sodium and other chemicals. For some (but not all) people, high sodium levels lead to higher blood pressure. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains and seafood can help maintain a healthy heart and can also be quite delicious. So make your heart happy while you pump up the variety in your diet with a colorful plate of fabulous foods.

Resources:

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